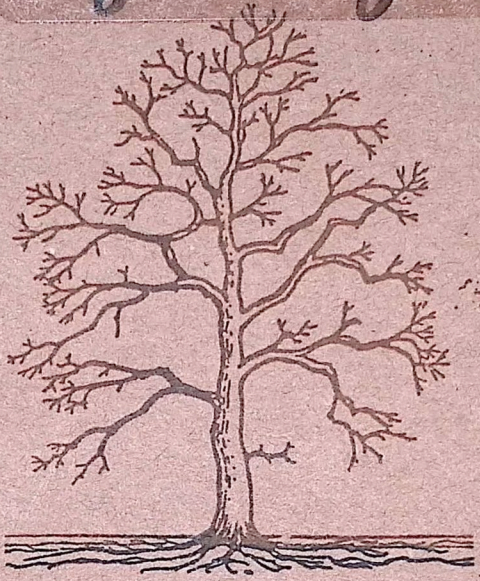
swing set girl

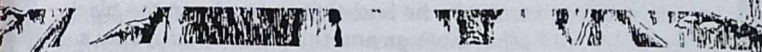


familia

number seven

there's a reason that trees have come to be common symbols of families. the tree is remarkable and reliable entity. it's roots dig far into the earth and feed it's constant growth and keep it sturdy through the storms. it's branches are constantly spreading and then spouting and loosing life. no tree is exactly the same and each survive through their own adaptation.

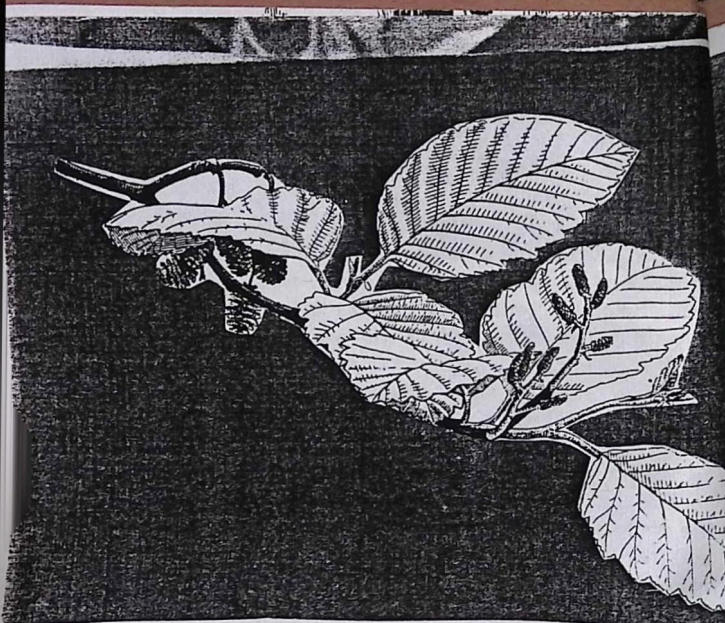
this zine is about family, mental illness, and unconditional love. it's not so much a tragedy...it's more of a love story and a story about growing up. part of me feared putting this all on paper and exposing my family and myself to the world with few barriers, but that fear is exactly what i'm trying to conquer. this is not an exposé of shame...it's a memorial to hope. this zine is sort of a tangible gift of memorial to my family and the roots of my life, dark underbelly and all.



this zine is unlike any i've ever done before. it's a little less whimsical creative writing and little more of a comprehensive storybook. it's simple, with less focus on layout and background pictures and more focus on the text. the text was almost hard to contain. when i started this concept of writing about family, i just couldn't stop writing. there is so much to say and this zine almost took on a life of it's own, so there's a lot that had to be edited and a lot left unsaid. i suppose there's never enough time to really say *everything* you wish you could say.

there was a young boy who used to be full of life and love. he was brilliant. he could solve almost any math problem put before him, he taught himself to play music effortlessly, and he loved to take things apart and find out how they worked. the young boy grew to be a young man and left high school in his freshman year because he knew wasn't meant for it...or maybe he just couldn't handle it. he had always had been the black sheep of his four other siblings and this decision probably sunk him father into that role, but he passed his GED test at the head of his class and moved on to school to be a computer programmer where he graduated with honors. he fell in love with a woman and began with a beautiful life with her, they took trips together, held hands, smiled like they were on the top of the world, and eventually married. he brought her flowers and they were so in love. he got a good job with xerox, but lost it shortly after for reasons he would never know, or maybe never say. he moved on to another job repairing betting machines at the race track.

somewhere along his life, he started to hear mumbles in his head. he couldn't make out the words, but he knew that they were there. he finally told his wife and she stood by his side, not thinking much of it. they had a baby girl soon after and were so in love. soon after the baby was born, he had a problem with his kidney and needed to have a surgery. after the surgery the mumbles became louder and louder and he started to make out words. paranoia set in and he began to believe that while he was operated on and under anesthetic, the doctors had planted a device in his body to torment him and track him and ultimately ruin his life. he would never tell his young wife what the voices said, but his life fell apart after that. he lost his job at the race track and his abilities to fit into a normal life faded a little. he would loose many jobs after that and loose his ability to do what he had planned, to be a computer programmer, because he was so easily frustrated with the voices yelling at him constantly. he had lost his ability to work with people or make any wages above the minimum wage line and eventually, the family was unable to support themselves and moved back into his childhood home to live with his mother. they said it was temporary, but as his condition deteriorated and the family struggled to stay above water, they ended up staying there the next eighteen years and that is where they would remain.



still, his wife stood by his side without saying a word because she couldn't understand what was happening to her husband. they had another child five years after their first. another baby girl. they maintained a somewhat normal, happy, functional family for a few years and they did their very best. as time went on, it got harder and harder to pretend as his voices plagued him daily and caused him to break out in rage and sometimes come out in emotional and physical abuse of his family. his wife asked him to get help for his voices, but he told her that she was just part of their plan to steal him away and take everything close to him. he would say that "they" (the voices) were coming to get them all, that "they" would come and destroy his wife and his two children. he told her that if she ever committed him to a mental institution, then he would kill her. she believed him and she was afraid for her life.

in charge of myself.

he still found small happiness in his life. he loved to play the guitar and the harmonica and he would spend hours fine tuning his home computer. he had one best friend that pulled him out of his darkness and forced him to see the light of day and offered him companionship. he would go out to parties and take his daughters fishing and to baseball games. he had finally found a job that he could work, he worked for his cousin installing carpeting...it wasn't much money, but it was enough to support his family and although the work was physically taxing and caused him to age faster as the days wore on him, he was able to do a monotonous task to fill his days and numb his mind a little and it did not require much social interaction. and then one day, he found out his best friend had died. killed in a motorcycle accident. his heart must of broken and it caused him to plummet further into his antisocial behavior. he had no one to drag him out or to talk to about the things he loved, so he closed up. he stopped leaving the house or having friends. he would occasionally go out with his wife to make appearances or take his children on day trips, but he spend most of his days alone with the voices. he learned to live with them, as much as he hated them and as much as they tormented him and tried to hard to ruin him, he didn't give it all up. that was an amazing accomplishment on it's own. he wasn't able to get better, he just lived with them and didn't give it all up as much as it seemed that he wanted to some days.

he did see a doctor one time and was diagnosed paranoid schizophrenic, but no one ever told his family what that diagnosis really meant. he was put on medication, but within a couple of weeks, he had decided that the medication was part of "their" plan as well and it was the doctor's way of mind control. he stopped taking his medication before the effects could ever be seen and he went back to his darkness with a fierce revenge.

there were a lot of days that he functioned flawlessly, not ever really letting on that anything was wrong. and he was able to hide it very well when he was outside of his home, but there were many days that he would come home to his comfort zone and let the demons out. his frustration was easily tested and he often yelled loudly at his voices when he thought he was alone, but the family always heard it. his children would cower in corners and his wife would lock herself in the bathroom just to cry, all unable to understand and all so afraid. he told them sometimes that he would just end it all. often in the car, even with his children, he would get triggered and make threats to his voices and tell them that he would wrap his car around a pole to make them happy. it's estimated over 90% of schizophrenics are told by their voices to take their lives. 1 in 10 schizophrenics commit suicide. 1 in 4 attempt suicide. the disease was deteriorating him with every moment, but he never gave up and he never left the family he loved so dearly (despite his difficulty in expressing his love).

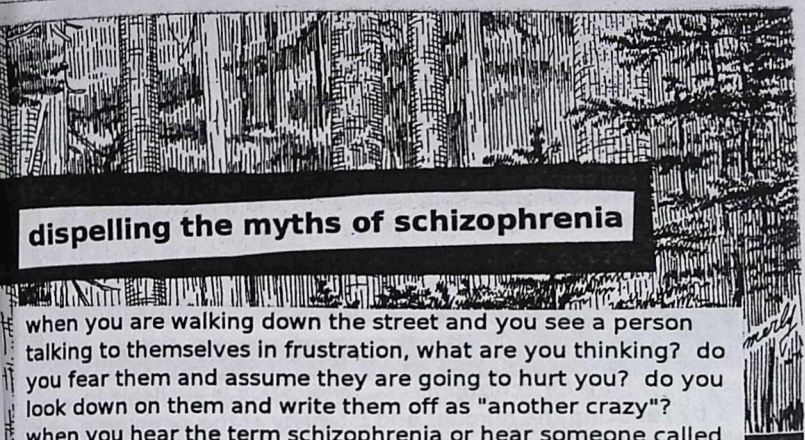
that happy young boy was my father. that man that suffers daily is my father. it has only been recently that i knew how to tell his story before the birth and childhood of his first daughter. i've written about this before (see issue 5) and i could tell the stories about my own life and how his illness has impacted me, and that's really important. it's important for me to say it out loud and internalize it in order to be able to grow and forgive. it is important to me to have name for his illness and to see it as an illness, so that i have strength in networking and factual evidence to show. but, it's also important for me to be able to see past facts and statistics to see a man who created me and did his very best to raise me...to see a man who wasn't always the way i remember him. it was a hard thing to uncover. all my life my dad's illness has been the elephant in our family's living room...we lived it every single

day and we were each individually devastated by it's effects, but we never ever talked about it. we were never able to support each other or understand what was going on and we never were able to support him because of that. this oral history of a man that is still breathing and still loving me is just one large step towards being able to see past his diagnosis and to forgive and support.

it's a gift that my father is still alive and that he never gave up no matter how much he wanted to. i wish he had the ability to get help, but i also understand the nature of the low income mental health industry as i wind myself through it. i hear the stories and i see the scars from the underbelly of mental institutions. i support the idea of my father attempting medication and seeing a doctor and working past this on his own terms, and honestly as hard as it gets, i'm really glad that he was never institutionalized against his will and taken from me. i'm glad that his tragedy doesn't include being tied to a dirty hospital bed, abused, ignored, and forcefully medicated. i can't give up the hope that he can get better without that option because i know it's possible, but i know that it would be so hard for him to do and i can't expect it from him.

now, the best i can do is learn to support him while i support myself. now, i am looking at his life as a real storybook full of tragedy, but also full of laughter and hope and humanity. i see the part where he walked the halls of the very same schools that i did in my childhood, the part where he was in love with my mother and showed her that everyday, the part that tells of his brilliance and accomplishments, the part the reminds me that he has the capacity to be close to someone even though it's so hard. he and i are not close. we love each other, but we are physically three thousand miles away from each other and even further apart emotionally. i'm hoping to close that emotional gap just a little bit each day. this was about that very goal. the truth is, i've never really talked about anything serious with my father because i was taught to fear his responses. it wasn't uncommon to hear the phase "ok, well we are just not going to tell daddy about this" in my household and that was about survival and escapism and i don't blame anyone for teaching me that, but now i need to teach myself to slowly push those barriers. i know now that the anti-social behavior he displays is probably not willful, but rather a result of this brain disorder, but i want to commit to trying to communicate with him as a person. maybe that's the best i can do right now.

i also feel that i need to share my story and educate to try to make these things better, so thank you for reading.



dispelling the myths of schizophrenia

when you are walking down the street and you see a person talking to themselves in frustration, what are you thinking? do you fear them and assume they are going to hurt you? do you look down on them and write them off as "another crazy"? when you hear the term schizophrenia or hear someone called a skiz, do you take any moment to internalize what that means or do you just ignore the topic because you're afraid of what that means? there are so many stigmas attached to mental illness in general, but schizophrenia seems to be one of the hardest because it seems so foreign to others and the concept seems frightening and all encompassing. fear is a fundamental tool of oppression and it's only through understanding and the breaking down of these fears that we can learn some lesson in equality and breaking down stigmas.

physical violence is not a prime characteristic of the schizophrenia. though some minority of schizophrenics can become violent to others, a vast majority are not prone to any violent outbursts. in other words, your likelihood of that "crazy" on the street causing you any physical harm is not any more likely than any other random person walking down that street. schizophrenics are much more likely to cause harm to themselves than to others and are more likely to be reclusive and retiring.

schizophrenia is a consistent long term (if not lifetime) mental illness. there is no known single cause for schizophrenia and the illness is not completely understood. it is believed that a chemical imbalance in the brain is an inherited factor which is necessary for schizophrenia to develop and this imbalance is often genetic. it is also likely that many factors - behavioral and environmental - play a role in the development of this mental health condition, but there is no one root cause for schizophrenia.

there is no cure for schizophrenia. medication is available to help by reducing the number and intensity of the symptoms, as well as decreasing the likelihood of having a relapse, but the medication can not cure all symptoms. often these medications also have devastating side effects such as seizures and disruption in the nerves and muscles controlling movement and coordination making the patient almost unable to function in some cases, serious weight gain in short periods of time, extreme drowsiness or restlessness and insomnia, blurred vision, intense and consistent nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, heartburn; sexual dysfunction, menstrual abnormalities The most disturbing and common side effects of typical antipsychotic drugs involve the nerves and muscles controlling movement and coordination. in fact, a 1999 analysis reported that fewer than 12% of patients faithfully took these drugs over the course of a year and that is because of the side effects involved. other side effects of these drugs include high risk of stroke, diabetes, heart attack, heat stroke, dramatic drops in white blood cells (potentially life-threatening), hypertension, unhealthy cholesterol levels, osteoporosis, breast cancer, and so on. although these side

effects are not problem in every patient, and vary depending on the drug and the development of new medications is working to reduce these risks, it's important to understand that these side effects do play a large part in an inability or unwillingness to get medicated treatment. it's also important to realize that these drugs are often the only therapy offered to schizophrenics because they are often seen as "hopeless" and for that, we are a long way from forming proper and safe treatment for people with this illness.

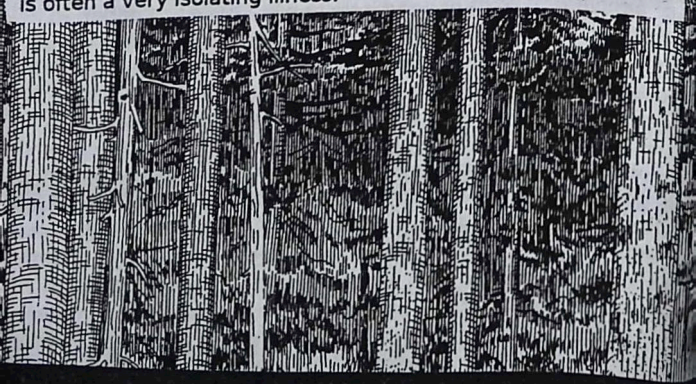
schizophrenia is not split personality or multiple personality disorder. the person has one single personality, the disease means that the person's thoughts become disordered and this can be confusing, but this is not a split personality.

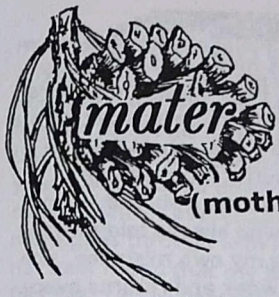
many people with schizophrenia find it difficult to get treatment, and those who refuse treatment because of the confusion in their minds more often never get treatment at all. because of an always growing crisis in healthcare and constant cuts in mental health programs, it is increasingly more difficult for people who want or need help to even have the option to reach out and receive it. although people with schizophrenia occupy 80% of hospital beds in mental institutions (and this does NOT indicate that this 80% is receiving proper care), there are a tremendous amount of people that are simply turned away or lost in the shuffle or politics and paperwork.

schizophrenia is not an intellectual disability, it is a mental illness. people with the disorder are often intellectually brilliant and many are able to hold high level jobs. although some schizophrenics find it therapeutic and easier to hold lower level jobs with a lot of consistency, it is not the only option for them in the workplace.

one in one hundred people suffer from schizophrenia. there is no gender, race, or nationality more or less prone to the illness. the usual onset is between the ages of 15-30, but it can effect any person of any age. this means any individual is about 2.5 times more likely to develop schizophrenia than to die in a car accident. this illness is not as uncommon as we often believe.

any anti-social behavior shown by a person with schizophrenia is usually not willful but rather a result of this brain disorder. it is often a very isolating illness.





the process of understanding my father has also given way to learning a whole new way to see my mother. it's only through her that i was able to hear these stories beyond the man that i knew and the illness the blinded me. and when i made the decision to finally start asking questions, it was a very difficult day for she and i. she told me about his life and also her's and she cried so many tears that day. my mother is a beautifully strong person even if sometimes it's easy to loose sight of the fact. she has been the anchor of our family and the only glue that held us all together. there were many times when my mother had an uncontrollable temper and things were often said and done that created a strong barrier in my ability to see her as anything more that volcano waiting to erupt. but there was this other side of her that i've only now begun to really see and appreciate now that we are three thousand miles away and we are making choices when and how we communicate instead of feeling locked in a cage without the chance to appreciate each other.

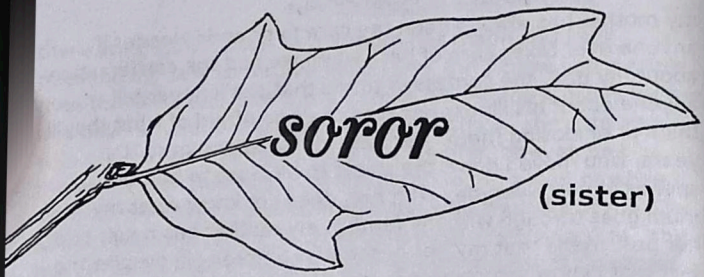
there are a lot of mistakes my mom has made and i still question my ably to forgive absolutely, but i know she is more than the mistakes. she is the woman who made lunches for me and gave anything she could to see me smile. she's the one who cried when she had to watch me suffer for even one moment (even just when the doctor gave me a shot or when i skinned my knees). she is the person who always told me how smart i was, but let me learn and make my own mistakes. she is also the woman who calls me every week and returns every message i leave her with "are you ok?" and talks to me for hours about my life and sometimes even cries because she misses me so much.

there's so much beauty in being able to see the woman who birthed you and choose to bring you into this life, the one who would give up everything just so you'd never feel pain, as the person that she is without all of the fuzz of growing up. i'm just now being able to see my mother and i'm just now being able to look into my childhood and forgive her and find the lighter parts of the life we shared.

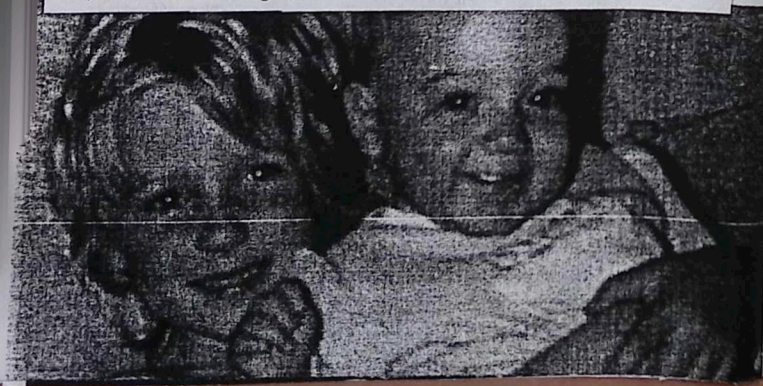
our family is littered with parts of dysfunction, but that's not all we are. my relationship with my mom gives me hope. it gives me hope that i'll someday be able to have a positive relationship with my sister and my dad and it gives me hope in knowing that i'm not alone and that family is much more beautiful that i'd ever thought.

my mother has always been the caregiver and i wonder if anyone ever takes care of her. when we had the conversation about my dad, she confessed to me that she'll never tell anyone about his illness because she's so afraid of what they'll think or of loosing them. her best friend for the past 10+ years, who moved down the street to be close to her and spends almost everyday with her, does not know what my mom goes through with my father. my mother has never told her best friend that my her husband is mentally ill despite the fact that i know somewhere in her heart she is desperate for support.

my mother is such a victim to stigma. the term "stigma" refers to the widespread negative attitude of fear regarding people who are mentally ill which causes them to be cut off from society and mistreated. stigma is the barrier that his discouraged my family from getting the help that they need and it is the barrier that kept us isolated and never even able to talk to each other about the collective issues the effected each other. stigma is the thing the mom fears the most and it makes me afraid for her. i know in her heart she wants to desperately to understand and have support, but her fear keeps her from being able to take the step forward. i want to be my mother's support, but i know i can't do it alone. i just hope that my small step forward in my need to break my own barriers will help her know that it's possible and relive a worry that i know she must secretly have in knowing that i'm confident that i'm going to be ok. i also know that this is a step in bringing us closer and learning to finally understand each other.



growing up is hard. it's a constant stuggle to keep your head up and constant effort to try to grasp what's going on inside of you and to just be ok. i grew up full of frustration and anger. i grew up unable to understand or control my own emotions. maybe it's really normal to be a little messed up in your adolescence and it's easy to pass it off and use it as an excuse, but there's not really any excuse for the impact of your "growth" on those around you. i have unfortunately been at my worst in the time that i lived at home with my parents and my younger sister. i guess everyone's youth is littered with regret and i try to remember that when i look back at my own life, but there's a huge burden the life i lived back then.



it's a power struggle when a mistreated or unstable child tries to regain the power that is taken from them in their own life. often the only way to get that power is to mimic the action that took that power in the first place and thus hold someone else's power since they are unable to hold their own. the very action that broke my heart, that i knew too well, i did my best to make someone else feel. that person was my little sister, lisa. i also developed extreme mood swings at a young age. i had a difficult time dealing with my intense and always unstable emotions as a child and i acted out constantly. i took it out on everyone around me because i didn't understand what i want feeling and i had no idea how to cope. i was never taught a lesson about coping and i was never told that what i was feeling was valid, i just watched my parents act out on their frustration, sometimes in a hurricane of physical and emotional abusive behavior and i came to believe that was normal and that was the acceptable way to be and to deal with my feelings. at that point, i really believed it was just the way people were and it was completely ok to hit or scream and belittle. as much as it hurt and i wished it would never happen to me, i began to perpetuate it just as my parents were perpetuating and mimicking their own upbringing and a reflection of their lives.

i remember there were a lot of times when my sister and i were inseparable when we were young. i remember a lot of really positive moments as young children, but i also see a lot of darker parts of that relationship. i would constantly involve my sister in cat fights over the smallest thing until one of us when off crying. that one of us was almost always her since i was five years older and much bigger and more aggressive. we had screaming matches constantly and i called her every name i could think of even though she was too young to even know what a lot of that meant. i did things purposely to hurt her because at the time, i thought that was what i needed to have power and control. i needed to be in charge of my sister because i wasn't in charge of myself

what's worse is that i blamed my sister for the bullying. i told her things like "if you were a better sister, then i wouldn't be mean to you" bullying is not just a simple childhood game or excusable idea, it's a real form of abusive behavior. i now have confidence to say that i've unlearned most of that behavior and i've learned to understand my mood swings and stop the things that caused her and others in my life a lot of pain back then.

as i start to understand and forgive people in my own life and face negative impacts or actions of myself on others, i need to also understand how i've impacted others. the fact that my little sister has to grow up in the same circumstances i did and i know how hard it is just grow up and make it through high school leaves marks on your heart. but on top of that, she has to deal with my actions. even though i was only ten years old, i still effected her and i still have to realize that. i am far from that little girl from a decade ago and i hardly remember that person, but that little girl still lives in her.

there's not an excuse for it. i am understanding the roots of it and from there i'm trying to understand how to heal the opened wounds. and i know when she's ready heal, it will be the wounds i've made that need to heal and i'm trying so hard to understand what role i can play to help her heal.

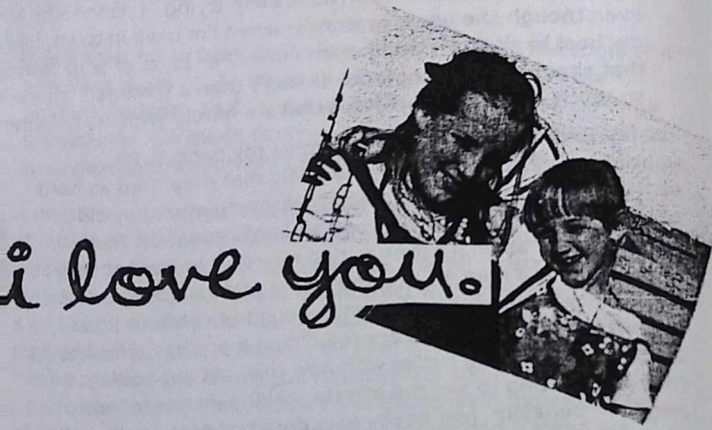
it also took until the time that i left her and my parents behind at eighteen for me to realize how broken our relationship really was and to know how badly i wanted a sister in my life. i watched my friends, as adults, interact with their siblings and i saw the beautiful potential of a bond that stems from being part of family. unfortunately, by then it was too late. when i began making the effort, she rejected me and it broke my heart. she told me that i didn't just get to walk back into her life after all the things i had put her though and it killed me. i

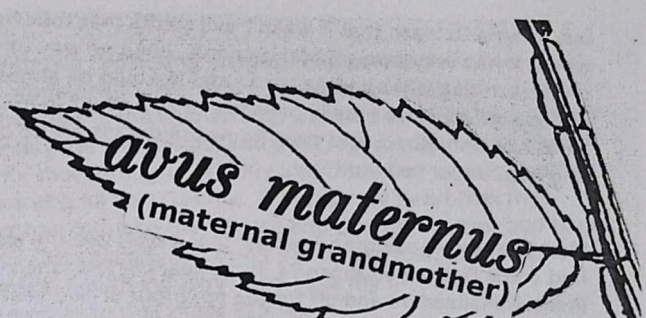
wanted so badly to for her to just let me in and forget it. but the truth is, now that i look back at that moment objectively without the tears in my eyes, i'm actually in awe of her strength in her ability to say no and to protect herself. i know that my intentions were honest, but she is still guarded from me and i don't blame her for that.

i'm still working on that breakthrough of her being able to let me in and to start to develop a healthy and really positive relationship with me. i want so badly to be there for her because i remember how hard it was to be her age and how much i needed someone and i desperately want to be that someone for her. i've made every effort i could in the past three years, but there is not three thousand miles of physical distance between us and it's difficult to break that space. i also need to be aware of her emotional space and i cannot push her healing process just because i want her to forgive me and i want to be a positive force in her life, because her healing is not up to me. the best i can do is keep trying. i send letters even though she never responds; when i'm back in town, i do my best to sit down with her and offer her parts of who i am so that she might just know me as more than a stranger. there is so much distance between us that we hardly know each other.

i've learned to understand and forgive my parents for upbringing because i know it my heart that they tried as hard as they could, but just like me at that young age, they still couldn't grasp the ability to cope and unfortunately, that meant the occasional acting out on others. i know that they never meant to hurt me and they were just as broken as i was and now that i'm able and strong enough to confront those actions with them and we are rebuilding a positive relationship and they are getting better with how they act out now that they are starting to see the effects. their pain doesn't excuse negative behavior, just as my pain does not excuse my actions, but we're getting better. and i just really hope that my sister and i will get better and i'm committed to trying

my hope is that someday, i'll be able to regain the trust of my younger sister and see how beautiful and powerful sisterhood can be. i hope to find a friendship that extends deeper in the roots of being family. i refuse to give up on that. i keep her prom photos on my wall and she's in my heart all the time and i just hope someday she'll really know that. we make wonderful steps all the time. two years ago for christmas, she gave me one of the most wonderful gifts in the world...she made a collage of all the wonderful happy photos of us growing up happy and wrote 'i love you' across the bottom and that will always be on my walls as a reminder that we aren't completely lost, it just takes time and there's a deep seeded love that just hasn't been able to blossom because of the dark patches





grandma phyllis was the best kind of grandmother that a little girl could hope for. she was calm and patient, always full of hugs and kisses. she loved to help us make craft projects and bake cookies. she had warm home cooked meals on the table for us whenever we saw her and a closet full of toys for us to play with. she had a cozy little house full of wonderful old things and told us stories and encouraged our imagination every chance she had. going to her house was this amazing treat for my sister and i. we spent every christmas there and most holidays and at least two weekends a month. she was a picture perfect grandmother.

when i was 10, my grandmother had what they told me was a "nervous breakdown" there were no signs and nothing particular that brought it on, but one day i just remember being told she was in the hospital. i asked my mother why and she simply told me that "she's just sick right now" and didn't really explain the situation to me. it was only in overhearing the conversations of the adults in my house that i learned that one day she just got lost in her own mind. apparently, one day, her eyes just rolled back in her head and she started shaking horribly. when i heard them talking, i imagined an awful horror movie in which my grandmother was possessed by demons.

but, i came to learn that it wasn't evil spirits that took her, it was just her very own mental demons. i had no way of understanding what had happen. and it would be almost a decade before it was really honestly talked about to me just what had happened, and even know the details are so unclear and kept under lock and key.

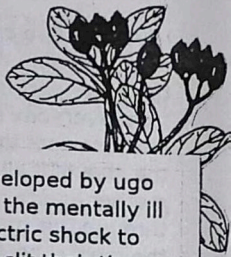
i lost my story book grandmother that day. i lost the woman i had come to know in those 11 short years of life. she was institutionalized on and off for the next four or five years. i only saw her once in the hospital. i think it was the only time that my mother felt like she was doing ok enough for her not to frighten us and it was the only time when she was living in a hospital that was a little further from an absolute nightmare.

that day was a really beautiful day. i had no idea at that point that my grandma was in a "mental institution"...i was always just told she was sick and in the hospital. and i didn't think of "the hospital" the way i might have interpreted "the institution". i didn't understand what it all meant. but that day that we went to see her, it was a place far from what i dreamed "the institution" would look like. it was more like a nursing home with art rooms and comfy couches and fancy artwork and beautiful structures. it had a cherry trees and beautiful pond that my grandma took us out to feed the fish and an opened cafeteria with wonderful treats. she had friends there and she seemed rather content...maybe even happy and i saw little pieces of her smiles that i remembered as a little girl. and she was so happy and full of love to see us there with her and have us in her life that day. but i soon learned that her insurance and savings would soon run out too fast to keep her in that lovely place and she had to be transferred back the less expensive state hospitals. when she was in the state hospitals, my mother seemed a little sadder every day she spoke to her.

i live with two conflicting images. one part is the sweet gray haired woman with fresh baked cookies and bed time stories. the other part is the woman who was tied down to beds, taken from everyone she knows, and then repeatedly having electric currents shot through her body and trembling in pain and fear. the idea of it all horrifies me. it breaks my heart that my mother had to make that choice and that my mother had to go through this process of loosing her own mother in the mess of the mental health industry. and i lost my beautiful grandmother to that mess as well.

i don't know what her whole experience was at the state hospitals, but i know they took away the last little pieces of her that i'd ever see. one day, i heard my mom crying on the phone telling the person on the other line that her mother had forgotten who she was. this was right after the electroshock. it had been at least three years in and out of the hospitals and they told my mom it was their last hope. recently, my mother told me about how my grandmother didn't want to do it and resisted, but the doctors laid it out to her like some miracle cure with only positive results. the results we not a miracle. she underwent the entire series of 7 shock treatments. afterwards, she showed just a small improvement, but for the first few days or weeks, she had lost many of her memories and didn't know her own daughter's face.

the facts of electroshock



modern electroshock therapy, or ETC, was developed by ugo cerletti. cerletti came up with his idea to treat the mentally ill by watching slaughterhouse operators use electric shock to send pigs into epileptic convulsions in order to slit their throats. which is essentially what ECT does to humans.

electroshock was one of four radical techniques introduced in the 1930s to treat mental illness. besides electroshock there was lobotomy, insulin coma therapy, and metrazol convulsion therapy. electroshock is the only one still in common use.

in the 50s, patients would simply be strapped down tightly to a gurney and charged with heavy electric currents through their temples. there was no anesthetics or mussel relaxers used in the procedure and the patient would be conscience through the entire painful process of forced electrocution. the electric currents cause intense repeated seizures during the procedure and this often resulted in many broken bones, especially in the vertebrae. patients would sometimes receive this procedure more that 100 times. this procedure was also very often used as a means of punishment and sedation for difficult patients at the psychiatric wards. the procedure has evolved and become just slightly more humane in the past fifty years...now, the use of anesthetics and muscle relaxers are used to reduce bone fractures and the voltage typically used has been reduces.

the shock induces an electrical storm that obliterates the normal electrical patterns in the brain, driving the recording needle on the machine up and down in violent, jagged swings. this period of extreme bursts of electrical energy often is followed by a briefer period of absolutely no electrical activity, called the isoelectric phase. the brain waves become temporarily flat, exactly as in brain death, and it may be that cell death takes place at this time. a shock-induced seizure is typically far more severe than those suffered during spontaneous epilepsy.

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doctors do not know why ECT actually works to fight mental illnesses. it seems so unscientific and remains a mystery, but many doctors will support the procedure fiercely (the procedure does put millions of dollars in the hands of doctors every year). the national institute of mental health estimates that 110,000 americans now receive electroshock each year and it seems that the procedure has become overused and not just as a last chance effort. it doesn't seem to be used to "save" people, but instead to simply be implemented as soon as the chance arises. there is a lot of talk about how this procedure is hinged on personal consent, but the fact is that it has been preformed on thousands and thousands of patients that do no have the ability to consent. who speaks for those people? it is clear to most patients of institutions see the effects of this procedure on a daily basis and they learn very quickly to fear it because all they see is the effect and aftermath, so it seems unlikely that majority of patients would willingly participate in this act that had been previously used as a form of punishment. it also seems that for those who are talked into clear consent to the procedure, there is little in the way of objective information given to them to effect and educate their choices.

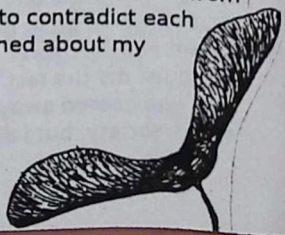
there have been a lot of positive reported stories and effects of ECT as a treatment for severe depression, bipolar disorder, and anxiety disorders, but it's unclear what the root of this improvement can be accredited to. many people argue that what looks like "relief" or "improvement" is really just the effect of head trauma...just about as if a person were beaten in the head numerous times. and if the patient come out with significant memory loss and brain damage to the point that they no longer can feel or remember their identity, then are they cured?

the effect of ECT can be devastating. memory loss is the worst and most common side effect. often it is a temporary short term memory loss immediately after the procedure, but there have been so many cases where it has been much more severe and permanent. many people have lost their entire identities and memories and some even their essential memories of survival skills on that table. other most common side effects besides permanent brain damage, are headaches, nausea, confusion and muscle ache or soreness. recent reports indicate that the death rate for ETC is close to 1 in 200. 1 in 200 people are purposefully electrocuted to their demise. a study of death rates also showed a 23%-45% higher death rate for elderly people at one, two and three years after shock treatment compared to a control group of similarly aged people that received non-shock psychiatric treatment.

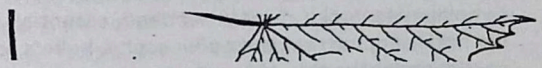
soon after my grandmother moved to florida to be with my aunt, i went with my mom to clear out her left over belongings from her house before it was sold. while we were cleaning, i came across a bible with an embossed symbol that looked a little like a compass with a G in the middle and a half triangle at the bottom. i knew i had seen the symbol before, perhaps at a graveyard etched into headstones. i asked my mother what it meant and she told me that her father was a freemason and that he would go to lodge with other men, but it was all a secret and she never knew what exactly they did there. i was intrigued my the fact that my grandfather, who i'd never met and who passed away just prior to my birth, was part of some secret society, but i didn't dwell on it much after that.

several years later, i was working at a 7 eleven. my co-worker was an elderly man named albert. while he was ringing a customer up, they asked him what his ring meant. i looked over an notice that his gold ring had that same symbol i had found on my grandfather's bible. i told him my grandfather was a mason as well and his eyes lit up and he grabbed my arm and told me that i need to join. me in a secret society? he said that the masons were accepted by having immediate relatives and he could look up my grandfather and i would be able to be sponsored by his wife. he seemed really into recruiting me and it kind of freaked me out. it turns out, i wouldn't really be able to be a mason, i would be able to join the women's group associated with the masons called the eastern stars. when i asked what they did, he told me they baked things and supported the lodge. he kind of made it seem like the eastern stars were about fifty years behind in the women's movement and that didn't seem too appealing to me at the time, which really disappointed him. he brought it up several times afterwards asking me if i was sure i didn't want to join and he even had his wife come up just to meet me. at which time i promptly excused myself to the bathroom for at least twenty minutes and read some zines to escape. i wonder if he got freemason points for recruiting people?

i wanted to write all about the freemasons and explore their mysteries in this zine, but it turns out that is an enormous task because no one really knows where the freemasons come from and all the information i've found seems to contradict each other. but this is a little bit of what i learned about my grandfather...



when the crusades look their place in the middle east, it was necessary for military orders to exist within the state they had conquered in order to secure it. members of the monasteries in europe moved to palestine and were trained to fight against the muslins. this order became know as the poor fellow-soldiers of jesus christ and the temple of solomon, or the knights of templar. it was formed in 1118 and at first there were 9 members, but the order quickly grew. the templars called themselves "poor soldiers," but within a short time they became very wealthy. christian pilgrims, coming from europe to palestine, were under the complete control of this order, and by whose money they became very rich.



it was the templars who were mainly responsible for the crusaders' attacks of and murder of muslims. for this reason, when the crusaders were finally defeated in 1187, the templars were put to death. despite this, the templars continued to exist and they increased their power in europe and, first in france, and then in other countries. finally, in 1307, the French king Philip le Bel decided to arrest the members of the order. some of them managed to escape but most of them were caught. following a long period of interrogation and trial, many of the templars admitted to heretical beliefs, that they had rejected the christian faith and insulted jesus in their masses. the leaders of the Templars, who were called "grand masters," were executed in 1314 by order of the church and the king. the majority of them were put into prison, and the order dispersed and officially disappeared.

the trial of the templars ended with the termination of the order. but, although the order "officially" ceased to exist, it did not actually disappear. some templars escaped. a significant number of them took refuge in the only kingdom in europe that did not recognize the authority of the catholic church in the fourteenth century, scotland. there, they reorganized under the protection of the scottish king. some time later, they found a method of disguise by which to continue their existence: they infiltrated the most important guild in the medieval british isles—the wall builders' lodge, or "the masonic lodge" and eventually, they fully seized control of these lodges.

the scottish rite is the oldest branch of masonry, and dates back to the beginning of the fourteenth century, to those templars who took refuge in scotland. essentially, the templars did not disappear, but their philosophy, beliefs and rituals still persist under the title of freemasonry.

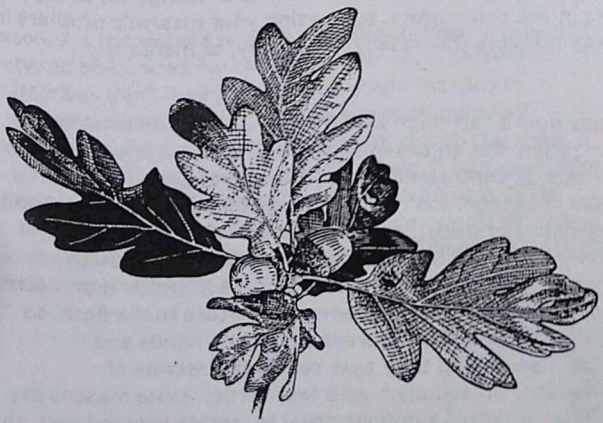
freemasonry is the world's largest, oldest and most prominent fraternity. no one knows for certain how or why it started. some historians think it began with the stone masons of classical greece and rome or from the egyptian pyramid builders. others believed it to have originated with the craft guilds of medieval europe and in recent times, it has expanded to admit those who did not actually belong to an operative trade. there are a lot of people who think it's origins lie in a number of secret societies that go back to the crusades like the knights of templar and the illuminati.

today, freemason lodges claim to have evolved into more simple fraternities. though, there are some people who believe the freemasons are still in a conspiracy to take control under "the new world order". a mason's basic definition on the masonic perspective is that it is, "a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols." monotheism is the sole dogma of freemasonry. belief in one god is required of every initiate, but his conception of the "one god" is left to his own interpretation. freemasonry symbolizes this syncretistic god with the letter "G" and the name, Great Architect of the Universe (G.A.O.T.U.). by referring to the generic god as "gaotu" this is supposed to allow the mason to insert their own title to this god including (but not limited to) buddha, jehovah, vishnu, lucifer, jesus, allah, or krishna. it almost seems strange that a sect so heavily involved with the murder of muslims in it's roots has evolved into accepting them as part of their lodge. the masons state that the other foundation for becoming a mason lies in the ideas of respecting moral authority, acceptance, charity and willingness to support others in the community, supporting your masionic brothers in anyway possible (financially, physically, or mentally).

masons now often claim that freemasonry is not a secret organization, but an organization with secrets. masons claim that the only considered things masonic secrets are the "modes of recognition" which include due gaurds, signs, tokens (handshakes or grips), and passwords. the initiation of a mason includes being "received on the point of a sharp instrument piercing their naked left breast, which is to teach them that as this is an instrument of torture to the flesh, so should the recollection thereof be to their minds and consciences, should they ever reveal the secrets of freemasonry unlawfully." as a fear tactic. some masons say this is just a simple symbolic ritual to create brotherhood and

is meant as a metaphor for internal pain in the conscience and that few secrets really exist, but many critics argue that this is proof that the lodges hold many very important secrets that are so crucial that they would be protected by torture.

the eastern star is a female branch off of the freemasons. the real origin of the eastern star, like masonry, will always be shrouded in mystery and is very unclear when it started. many researchers believe it had a french origin as early as 1703. by some, this is claimed to be the first inception of "female masonry" or "androgynous degrees" (degrees for both men and women). by the laws of that ancient order of the masons, women are not eligible for degrees within the masons. so, as an effort to make masonry a family supported agenda, the eastern star was formed.

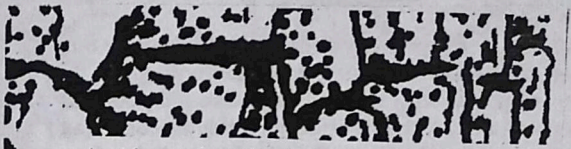


only men who are masons are eligible and only women with specific masonic affiliation may be members of the eastern star. these affiliations include: affiliated master masons in good standing, the wives, daughters, legally adopted daughters, mothers, widows, sisters, half sisters, granddaughters, stepmothers, stepdaughters, stepsisters, daughters-in-law, grandmothers, great granddaughters, nieces, great nieces, mothers-in-law, and sisters-in-law. these women must only be associated with masons in good standing (or good standing at the time of their death) and must be verified by lodge records. they must be at least eighteen years old to join. women submit petition and eligibility is investigated. after eligibility is verified they must be unanimously voted in by representing "mental, moral and spiritual quality who will work together in harmony to perform its objectives". objectives include the dedication to "the spirit of fraternal love to work together on projects to benefit mankind" and the organization of mansionic youth groups such as rainbow for girls, the order of demolay for boys, and the job's daughters for young masions in training.

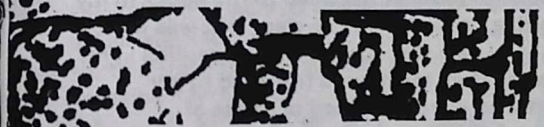
it turns out, i was unable to discover the secrets of the freemasons and there are a ton of other conspiracy theories about how they are plotting to take over the world that i just didn't have the time or space to get into in depth. i also wanted to write more about the racism which exist within masionic lodges with their "separate but equal" philosophy at some lodges, but again, all of this would be an entire zine on it's own. but i did discover that i'm pretty happy to have decided not to take my coworker up on his offer, but perhaps someday i was infiltrate the order of the eastern star just to satisfy my curiosity that all the books on masonry in the world can't really clear up for me.

our house was dysfunctional at times, but there was so much love and support that i'm sure you never got to see. my parents gave grandma everything they could and they really did their best to support her and always make sure she had a hot meal on the table every night and make sure she had everything that she needed. and my sister and i tried to do the best we could to make her happy. though i might not have known it then, i was so lucky to grow up and be supported by the woman that also raised you and i hope you can appreciate what means. there was never any deceit involved, it was all just simply family doing the best they could and you weren't really there to see it, but just know that it was there and that's the only thing i really want you to understand more than anything in the world.

now, it seems the concept of family has been lost in this time after her death and it's heartbreaking. i saw you the day that you came up from maryland just to take her to the lawyer after she had gotten sicker. that day she looked so panicked and bothered, but her communication skills had been lost by the althemers. we both know she was not stable enough to communicate or make and legal actions because she had no ability to speak her mind. that beautifully outspoken woman was plagued with an illness that had brought her to that moment of not even being able to speak. her eyes were sad and worried that day more than i had ever seen them. i don't know why you needed to take her to the lawyer's office that day, but i know it didn't seem right. i know in my heart that if any alterations were made to her estate or will that day, then it was completely immoral and illegal because of her unstable state of mind, but i'm not going to make accusations of what did or didn't conspire at the law office because that is up to your conscience to live with it.



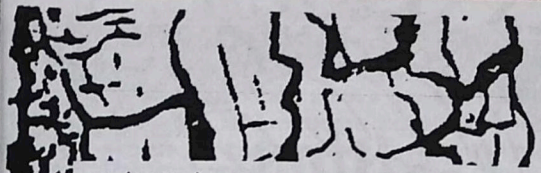
we lost her a few short weeks after that day and it was devastating for everyone and i know it must have broke your heart to loose your mother as it broke my heart to loose a grandparent and secondary mother figure in my life that day. do you know when i went to see her at the hospital the day before she past and i asked to be alone with her for a few moments (which was met a great deal of protest from you), she tried to tell me something? something that i didn't have any idea what it could've meant at that moment because her communication skills were so lost, but when the will was disclosed by you (the executor of the estate), i had a good idea of what she wanted me to know. did you know that she stuttered your name and she looked so sad and shook her head and kept saying no and she said the word house among her gasps of frustration? and it was so incoherent that i didn't understand and i was so heartbroken to see her like that, that i just left and left her words as nothings. but i honestly now believe that my grandmother's dying and last words to me were to tell me about this.



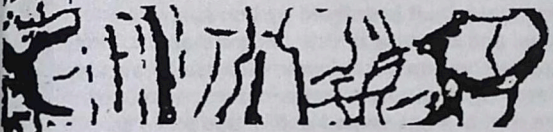
i'm now filled with guilt for not doing anything. for not taking the time to listen and understand her that day and for not standing up and finding out what your intentions were the day you came to our house to take to the lawyer. but nothing like the guilt i'd imagine you'd live with.

the last will and testament of my grandmother took away our home and gave you a piece of it. and you and i both know that is not what she really wanted. she left her money to you and the other siblings and all my parents desperately needed was just the roof over their heads where they had been living for almost two decades. the house in her name is my parent's only home. the will clearly states that it was her intention to leave the house to my father, but there was so much confusion in the many tries to transfer the deed before her death that it unfortunately never happened. but it was what she wanted and i know that you know in your heart that it's true. i'm not heartbroken over this legal battle because i think my parent deserve anything... i'm heartbroken because i think my grandmother deserves to have her last wishes fulfilled. i know she would be so devastated if she were alive to see the turn of events resulting in property and death.

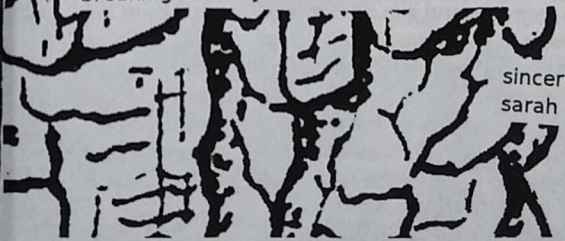
i realize that my parents contest to the will is in part because they desperately need that home. but i also know that it's because they know this is what she wanted and they know that and feel it's just the right thing to do to carry out her wishes. i was also in my living room the day she and her sister were talking about the need to transfer the deed to the house to my dad as soon as possible. and she was so clear that was what she wanted to do. and i also saw something so beautiful in my mother that day. when they mentioned the deed to my mother, there was not an ounce of greed or sense of entitlement in her...she simply looked at mother-in-law with the most sincere eyes i've ever seen and asked her if that was what she really wanted. there was no assumption or obligation for grandma to have to say yes...there was not a trace of pressure or deceit. it's was a pure and honest question and action of complete and utter respect for her. and my grandmother said yes, it was what she honestly wanted.



and now, here we are. family fighting family for material things. we've lost one member of our family to ovarian cancer and there's cancer of a different kind consuming our family. the greed is too much to fight. when did we forget that this is not about any of us in this life? this is about her. about what she wanted.



i'm not writing this letter to change your mind because i know that's unrealistic. i'm writing this letter more for me than for you just so that the things that need to be said but might have been lost, are now said. and so that you understand what all of this means. it is also my way of mourning your loss. i no longer aspire to make you love me because i know i can't really ever learn to respect you after this experience and my will to love has been broken and defeated by your actions. also, just know that it's you that will live with those actions and i hope it's all worth it. i hope that $20,000 to your bank account was worth disrespecting your own mother and brother and breaking a family.



sincerely,
sarah

beatitas

(feline)

family is what you make it...it is defined by bonds and unconditional love. and because of that , no zine about family would be complete without milo. milo came to use by accident within weeks of arriving in our new home in portland and he was really a large part of what helped define this place as "home".

he lived with my friend, korinna, and his two brothers in a house a few blocks from ours. his mother belonged to one of korinna's neighbors and died shortly after giving birth to her litter and they were taken in by korinna and her roommates. i spent almost everyday that summer at korinna's house and i had come to know and love the three little kittens that lived there. one was black and gray and adopted by her roommate, another was a light orange cat that owned korinna's heart, and then there was the other little orange cat that no one wanted. the little orange cat had developed an eye infection that caused his eyes to water and run on his face like sad little tear puddles and no one in the house could afford the vet visits and care for him and he broke my heart with his sad little eyes. we weren't looking for a cat at that time because we were so new to town, but i couldn't turn away from him. we decided that our little apartment on maryland avenue was the home that he needed and it turns out he was the bit of light and love that i really needed. we needed each other.

i introduced the little orange cat to my partner in a little clearing next to the laundry mat and they fell in love right there. i took the kitten up in a box and started walking the ten or so blocks to his new home, but his little sad, squeaky cries from inside the box made my heart sink. i took him out of the box after only a couple of blocks and unzipped my sweatshirt and placed him inside, then zipped him up so that just his little head was poking out of the neck line as we walked the rest of the way, he purred like crazy the entire way home. it was the start of our life together.

i took him to the vet and got the medication to clear the infection up and got all of his shots and as much as he hated that experience, afterward he would always purr and rub himself up against me as if he knew i was just trying to help. after much debate, i named him milo. because my favorite movie as a child was milo and otis and he looked so similar to the orange cat that befriended the pug and went on adventures (and because i'm a complete cheeseball).
it's been two years since that little teary eyed kitten came into my life and he's now grown into a sweet and hyperactive cat. he's been at the door like a little puppy every single day i come home to welcome me and get a scratch behind the ear and he's woken me up laying across my body every night for the past two years. i am an animal lover by nature, but i've bonded to few animals like i have to milo. he's my one constant through all the twists and turns and he offers the kind of unconditional love most people can never dream of. he's my family and i love him like a mother would love a son.

amare

(love)

on supporting a loved on with mental illness...

this zine has been about family and when i reflect on my family at this point in my life, as a look at my own mental demons, i see a story of a family vastly effected by the issue of mental health. and in this, i've found it extremely difficult to learn my role in supporting the people that i love with their mental health while not loosing sight of my own support and stability. and now that i'm more clear on how i can best meet their needs as well as my own, i've discovred my needs with allies in my own life. i've participated in several workshops and panels dealing with this topic and i think it's about time i approched it on paper.

give yourself reasonable expectations of your goals as an ally. you are **not** going to cure someone who is mentally ill. that is their job and not yours and it may be impossible to "cure" someone. mental illness usually doesn't go away. it can better, but it will always be there. as an ally, you should simply set your hope at making your loved one feel just a little more in control and just a little bit better than without you. i've had friendships and relationships in my own life where individuals have actually inadvertently made me feel much worse and hopeless by their unreasonable expectations and the frustration that results when i didn't "get fixed" by their love. that isn't fair to anyone. this thought of yourself as the possible only "cure" for someone will only lead to your own disappointment and most likely theirs.

always ask for permission to be the ally. it might sound stupid to say "can i support you in this aspect of your life?" to someone you already love and support other ways, but it's so important. you can't assume that everyone needs the same thing or that they feel comfortable with you in that part of them. it doesn't mean they don't love you, but there sometimes there are people who you want to let into that part of you and sometimes there are people that you just might want to keep on another level of yourself so that you don't

in my situation, it is my parents, the people who are supposed to be my lead and example and care for me, that are in need of help. and that has effected me, for example, growing up and seeing the results of the illness in the form of abusive behavior or inappropriate coping mechanisms. an entire lifetime of this is a lot to handle and those scars in addition to my own demons have left many, many points of helplessness in me and internalized trauma. and it took me a really long time to realize that it is fine if i need to heal a little bit and start my own process before i can come back to help them in their process. i walked away from my family for almost three years as i started therapy and my path to self-actualization and also realize what my needs were in terms of support for my wounds and illness. before i left, it was a cycle of breaking each other and placing blame in different ways and i think that's incredibly common. and it's only now that i feel ready, that i feel like i'm making a positive impact on the development of a relationship. if i had continued to stay with them in my own unhealthy state, there would have been no real support. that's just an example on a personal level of how important that process of boundaries can be.

if you are hurting yourself in your offer of support, this only means that you are creating two unhealthy people instead of supporting one person to get to a better place. and consider that if you are jaded and ill-tempered, then your support and actions will also be jaded to the person who needs you which can possibly do more harm than good.

this also ties into a physical safety concern. if you are dealing with someone that has physically or emotionally violent tendencies, always remember that your first priority is to keep yourself safe. and you can ask for outside support or leave the situation.

i think that is the first key part to offering support: knowing your own needs and boundaries. you must realize that you are no good to anyone else if you are unstable or suffering as a result of your efforts towards others. it's really important for people to realize that it is ok to say no. it is ok to realize that you cannot be the support that someone needs right then and that you need to keep your own sanity before keeping theirs. and in this, it is ok to offer other solutions. if you are unable to give at moment of need, you can always do your best to support by offering alternatives and giving direction other networks or forms of support. it's also important that if you need to, you can reach out to others to essentially support you in supporting your loved one. it is not easy to handle watching someone in your life hurt or act out and that is something you need to understand because the effects of that difficulty can be very taxing on your own health.

having a conversation about needs before a situation even arises is really a wonderful tool for support. it's often the responsibility of the person with the needs to identify them. so, if you are living with mental illness , take a moment to take stock in what you need and in the signs that may initiate the need. if you know that once you start to spend a lot of money on frivolous luxury items, that this might be the start of a manic episode then tell your allies this and give them an idea of what can be done for them to help identify it and support you to not fall too far into it. and if you are in a manic episode, then what helps you feel better? tell your support system so that you can get those needs met and get better. do you need people to check up on you once a week to make sure you paid all your bills on time or that you've taken your meds this week? tell them! also, know your triggers that can bring you down that people may inadvertently say or do without knowing how hard it is on you and tell people so they can respect you. it's the job of the ally to really internalize this things and respect a person for who they are.

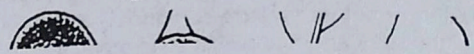
always ask! ask if it's ok to utilize outside or professional resources. know who else the person identifies as an ally and don't bring people into their lives that they are uncomfortable with. and know if there are other resources like certain doctors, councilors, naturopaths, massage therapists, social workers, and so on that can be used and offered as solutions. it's important to mention here, that the process of seeking treatment is incredibly emotional and difficult and it can really help someone to have another person to make phone calls or do research of local treatment centers. just remember that the final word is theirs and it's not up to you to make up someone else's mind.

this goes along with the decision to take or not to take medication. whether you are completely against the corporate medical industry and find psychiatric medication to be "mind control" or if you really think someone can benefit from taking drugs, these opinions of yours really shouldn't get in your way of supporting someone else in either direction. a key to being a good ally (and just a good friend or partner) is checking your personal judgments at the door.

always remember that pity is not a good tool. no one wants to feel like a burden or like that "crazy chick" with no other substance as a person.

it's important to find a balance between constructive support as an ally and relieving someone else's accountability. living someone else's life for them or shielding them from reality or ever feeling an ounce of pain can really do more harm than good and never teach that person to get better and encourage them to heal.

thank you for reading.



all i can hope is that occasionally my zines might strike something in someone...whether that is a challenge to belief systems, connection and understanding, or anger for what i've written. i hope it at least made you feel something even for a moment. and i really hope you take that moment to tell me about it. communication is so important. my friends really are the other half of my family tree and i hope you might consider being one of them, so write me a letter...

sarah s

[redacted]

[redacted]@riseup.net

i also make vegan soap in the shape of typewriters, vaginas, and bicycles...**http://**[redacted]**t**

distros and stores please get in touch for wholesale info.

the thank you list would be to long to list here. the family mentioned (and not mentioned) in these pages have impacted my life, but so have so many others. my wonderful friends give me a new form and definition of family and make my days worth it and they deserve more than thank yous.

this zine was created summer 2005.